

Scoping Notice

Fortification Creek Plan of Development Proposal

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Buffalo Field Office is preparing environmental assessments (EAs) for each of seven coal bed natural gas (CBNG) plans of development (PODs) in the Fortification Creek area (FCA) of the Powder River Basin (PRB). As part of the continuing development of the CBNG resources in the PRB, development is now being proposed in the already leased areas of the FCA. The BLM is specifically soliciting input on development in this area because of the degree of interest in the FCA resources and the BLM's planning decisions to manage the FCA to retain those sensitive resource values. The CBNG industry has proposed to take additional measures and employ best management practices in this area to assist BLM in managing those resource values.

Seven PODs, proposed by six different companies include a total of 158 CBNG wells to be drilled along with installation of associated facilities. The surface disturbance for these PODs is estimated to be approximately 350 acres. Along with the individual PODs, the companies have submitted 4 maps of the FCA showing an estimate of total known development planned for the area. They have worked together to identify common primary access and utility corridors. BLM will use these maps and additional information supplied by the companies to conduct the cumulative effects analysis for the EAs.

The BLM identified special resource values in the approximately 100,000 acre FCA when it delineated it in the 1985 Resource Management Plan (RMP). Important resources include an isolated elk herd and its habitat, high visual quality, a 12,000 acre wilderness study area (WSA), steep slopes with erosive soils, and cultural, historic, and or paleontological values. All of the federal oil and gas minerals have been leased in the FCA outside of the WSA. There is a section of state land in the center of the WSA that also has been leased by the state for oil and gas development. In order for the company holding that lease to access it, they must obtain a Right-of-Way (ROW) through the WSA. Though no application has been submitted to the BLM for the ROW, the BLM would like your comments relative to that potential proposed action. Current levels of oil and gas development in the FCA includes 62 conventional oil and gas wells that were drilled in the 1980's, some of which are still producing and 309 CBNG wells primarily on private mineral estate.

CBNG development of federal land and minerals has been ongoing throughout the PRB since the early 1990's. The PRB Environmental Impact Statement (PRB EIS) was completed in 2003. The PRB EIS contained extensive analysis of the effects of CBNG development upon water, air, wildlife and other resources throughout the PRB. Since the issuance of the PRB EIS Record of Decision, numerous individual PODs have been permitted through a site-specific environmental analysis conducted by the BLM. These EAs have been tiered to the PRB EIS which then incorporates, by reference, the analysis and information contained in the PRB EIS into the POD EAs. The EAs for these PODs will also be tiered to the PRB EIS.

The BLM would like your comments relative to this and future oil and gas development in the FCA. This scoping notice, a fact sheet and maps showing the FCA, the proposed PODs, and the companies known future development, can be viewed on the BLM Buffalo Field Office homepage at http://www.wy.blm.gov/nepa/bfodocs/fortification_creek. The above material will

also be available for review at the Buffalo Field Office. We plan to accept comments for 30 day from the published date of this announcement.

If you are interested in commenting regarding this proposal, we request you respond by sending your written or e-mail comments or concerns by June 23, 2006.

Written comments should be mailed to:

Bureau of Land Management
Attn. Paul Beels
1425 Fort Street
Buffalo, WY 82834

Comments may also be e-mailed to: Fort_Crk_WYMail@blm.gov

Your comments are important and will be considered in the environmental analysis process. If you do comment, we will add your name to a mailing list for this proposal in order to provide you future information regarding the EAs.